

Unknown Writer

SIR.—I was astonished to learn from Atticus that Madame E. L. Voynich is still alive. Some twenty-five years ago when I was still in my teens I came across "The Gadfly" and was so struck by its dramatic possibilities that I turned it into a play.

I had some difficulty in contacting the authoress as Messrs. Heinemann, her publishers, had lost touch with her, but I managed to do so eventually through her husband's firm, Messrs. Voynich, the well-known international antiquarian booksellers.

In her first letter to me she began by saying that my dramatisation was by no manner of means the first, for when the book was published in 1895 she had been offered blank cheques by theatrical managers for the dramatic rights.

She had turned down all the drafts submitted, however, because, she said, they had ignored the underlying theme of the book and merely exploited its dramatic potentialities. She was good enough to go on to say that my draft was the first that had appealed to her, and although she could not accept it in its present form she was willing to talk it over with me when she came to London.

I met her in a tea-shop in Piccadilly, and I can still recall very vividly the quaint Victorian figure in a long, trailing skirt and short tweed jacket and windswept grey hair studying me across the tea-table with her shrewd, piercing blue eyes. The upshot of the meeting was that she offered to loan me her own draft of the play

and suggested I study it and then try again.

When it arrived I realised it was hopeless—there were about thirty scenes, none of which she was prepared to cut, and reluctantly I abandoned the project.

But it is a source of gratification to me after all these years to learn that my young dramatic instinct had not been wrong.

R. Toole Stott.

London, W.1.

SIR.—May we add an interesting postscript to Atticus's remarks on "The Gadfly" which the "Soviet Survey" considered a major work?

In order to secure the dramatic rights of the novel, a version was made and given the usual one performance—the necessary procedure before the Copyright Act of 1911.

The perfunctory dramatisation was made by George Bernard Shaw, a fellow-Fabian (see "The Shaw-Terry Letters," No. 186.) It shared a "copyright performance" with his own play "You Never Can Tell," at the Bijou Theatre, Bayswater, on March 23, 1898.

R. Mander and J. Mitchenson.
London, S.E.26.

[Atticus writes: These are from a sheaf of helpful letters about Mrs. Voynich. Apparently she wrote four other books: "Jack Raymond," Heinemann, 1901; "Olive Latham," Heinemann, 1904; "An Interrupted Friendship," Hutchinson, 1910 and "Put Off Thy Shoes," Heinemann, 1946. One correspondent comments "My Victorian parents considered these books brutal and unnecessary."]